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ODH: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS LEAD POISONED DROPS

Parents must remain vigilant against this potential danger

COLUMBUS – The percentage of children identified as lead poisoned in Ohio dropped dramatically over the past nine years, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) reported today.

In 2003 – the latest year for which figures are available – 4.2 percent of Ohio children tested for lead poisoning had elevated blood lead levels, ODH said. That compares with 23 percent in 1994. Despite this significant progress, Ohio still has the fourth-highest number of lead-poisoned children in the country, ODH said.

“Ohio recently strengthened its lead laws and those changes are having a significant impact on the health of our children,” said ODH Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “Despite this progress, we still have work to do.”

Baird urged parents to have their children tested if they are at risk for lead poisoning.

Increased blood lead levels can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, hearing loss and other health problems. Lead-poisoned children may also have lower IQs and, as a consequence, decreased productivity.

Swallowing or inhaling household dust containing lead from deteriorating paint is the most common way children are exposed to lead. Deteriorating paint in homes built before 1950 poses the greatest threat and more than one-third of Ohio children ages 6 months to 6 years live in pre-1950 housing.

“Lead poisoning is preventable,” Baird said. “Through abatement, properly maintaining older homes, making sure any renovations are done in a lead-safe way and paying close attention to nutrition and hand washing, parents can help prevent lead poisoning.”

All Ohio children ages 1 and 2 who are enrolled in Medicaid and all children younger than 6 in high-risk ZIP codes must be tested for lead. A list of high-risk ZIP codes of Ohio is available on the ODH Web site at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov>.

ODH released this information to coincide with Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Awareness Week – July 17 to 23. Parents can call 1-877-NOT-LEAD for more information.

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